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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 001235

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: BALLOT PRINTING PITS UN AND ELECTORAL COMMISSION
AGAINST GOVERNMENT

Classified By: CDA Steven Koutsis, Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

(C) Summary

-- The UN steering committee is strongly opposed to the government's current ballot printing plan, which calls for two of the three ballots for November's elections to be printed by the state-owned national printer.

-- The UN ResRep has sent a letter to the government asking for the plan to be amended, adding that the UN basket fund will not fund the current ballot printing proposal.

-- A special UN steering committee meeting has been set for October 17 to address this issue.

(C) Comments

-- The government clearly wants to control the printing of ballots, and has the necessary funding to do so without basket fund support.

-- The government's stated reason for its preference for a local printer is its concern that an outside printer would not deliver the ballots in time, especially for the second round. Some observers speculate the true motive is to keep the profits inside Mauritania.

-- However, nearly all western partners and the Mauritanian's own electoral commission agree that the current proposal "leaves too many questions unanswered regarding the security and oversight of the ballots," opening the process to potential fraud.

-- If the government goes ahead with its plan despite western objections, it will not invalidate the transition. But it has caused unnecessary friction between the government and partners, and will make observers' work more difficult.

End Summary and Comments.

¶1. (U) An October 12 UN Steering Committee meeting, including representatives from the EU, UN, the Ministry of the

Interior, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and the embassies of Spain, France, Germany, and the U.S., focused on the government's ballot printing plan for November's elections.

CONCERNS OF FRAUD AND OVERSIGHT

¶2. (C) Steering Committee members agreed that the government's current ballot printing plan, which calls for two of the three ballots for November's elections to be printed by the state-owned national printer, "leaves too many questions unanswered regarding the security and oversight of the ballots," UN ResRep Cecile Molinier said. Partners authorized Molinier to send a letter (which was sent that day) to the Ministry of Interior explaining the position of the committee and would "make it clear that if the government does not address our concerns, that the basket fund will not fund the printing of ballots," as currently planned for. The letter said the Steering Committee will meet again on October 17 to discuss the matter further.

¶3. (C) EU Ambassador Jean Eric Paquet asked "why split the printing of the ballots," while the German Ambassador Ernst-Joachim Doring added that "the government's approach to this issue is very strange and inevitably leads one to question their motives." "If we don't have confidence in the security and oversight of the ballots, we can't have confidence in the elections," UN communications expert Riccardo Barranca said.

¶4. (C) CENI member Cheikh Saad Bouth Kamara shared the concerns of the other committee members, saying that "CENI

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began ballot printing discussions with the Ministry of Interior weeks ago, but the ministry's decision on how to print the ballots does not follow with the logic of those discussions." Pressed by committee members for more information, Kamara added that he was "confused" and "concerned" about this development. Kamara later added that the government's current plan did include CENI oversight of the ballot printing process, and he said "CENI will work to ensure the security of the balloting process regardless of what decision is made."

¶5. (C) Addressing the short timeline remaining for resolving the ballot printing issue, Paquet said "I don't want the government to respond favorably to our letter and say that they will work with us because I'm not sure that we have enough time to change things." Molinier added "the ministry was supposed to have resolved this issue in September, and here we are in mid-October without a consensus."

¶6. (C) The Ministry of Interior letter sent to Molinier on October 9 outlined the government's ballot printing plan, including the agreement between the Ministry of Interior and the national printer signed on October 3. The letter stated that the national printer would be responsible for the municipal ballots and ballots for the regional deputy races, while the ballots for the 14 national deputy seats would be printed by a printer selected by the UN. The document described the printing requirements for the national printer, including ballots being printed in a special color ink, using 90-gram card stock, and that ballots must include the state seal. The letter added that every security measure must be taken to "avoid the counterfeiting or parallel production of ballots." The letter said the national printer must begin printing ballots by October 31 for the municipal candidates and by November 10 for the legislative candidates.
Koutsis